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AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL REFUSED ACCESS TO EAST TIMOR FOR ANNIVERSARY OF SANTA CRUZ MASSACRE

Amnesty International today expressed regret that Indonesia's ambassador to Australia, Mr Sabam Siagian has refused to help an Amnesty International observation team to visit East Timor on the grounds that "it would create problems...for the Timorese people".

Amnesty International contacted the ambassador on 3 November 1992 asking him to intervene personally to allow the organization to observe the human rights situation in East Timor over the period of the anniversary of the Dili massacre.

Amnesty International believes that heightened tensions around the anniversary of the Dili Massacre on November 12 have increased the need for an independent humanitarian presence in the former Portuguese colony. "The refusal to allow the recent Australian Parliamentary delegation access to East Timor on "security" grounds is an indication of this tension and the consequent need for the presence of an independent observation team", the organisation said.

Earlier this year the Indonesian government endorsed a statement by the United Nations Commission on Human Rights - of which Indonesia is a member - which requested it to "facilitate access to East Timor for additional humanitarian and human rights organisations". In its application, Amnesty International asked Ambassador Siagian for his help in implementing the spirit behind this statement.

One year after the Santa Cruz Massacre in which at least 100 people were killed by Indonesian security forces and after which at least another 100 remain missing, there is serious concern, amidst reports of continuing violations in East Timor, that human rights abuses will increase around the anniversary of the massacre.

Amnesty International has therefore offered to send a mission to observe the implementation of the human rights commitments by the Indonesian government.

Commenting on Ambassador Siagian's position, Amnesty International Campaign Director, Andre Frankovits said, "this denial of access to East Timor, together with the suggestion that the motives of the Australian parliamentary delegation also recently denied access were to "stir up trouble", puts in question Indonesia's commitment to the decisions of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights".